

Dear Friends:

Texas' 81st Legislative Session began with a change of leadership in the Texas House of Representatives. While former Speaker Tom Craddick had served with honor over the past three legislative sessions, it was obvious to any objective observer that new and different leadership would be needed if the body were to function under circumstances where each political party had almost as many members as the other.

The 150 members came together and chose Joe Straus of San Antonio to serve as our new speaker. Speaker Straus made it clear early on that he would not dictate the agenda out of the Speaker's office. He would choose competent and experienced chairmen and chairwomen and allow these individuals to influence policy within their given area of expertise. It was his express intent to shift power out of the Speaker's office and back to the individual members of the House. I, along with most members, appreciated and whole-heartedly supported this change in philosophy. While Speaker Straus was thrown into this difficult position at the very last minute without the time that a Speaker typically has to prepare, he made us all proud by keeping his promises and also leading with ability and integrity and in a way that was fair to every House member.

Knowing that the Voter Identification issue would dominate the session, he asked me to serve as Chairman of the House Elections Committee. As meeting our state's growing transportation needs is and will remain a priority issue, he also appointed me to the House Transportation Committee. Finally, the next legislative session in 2011 will be dominated by the redistricting process that we must carry out every 10 years, so Speaker Straus asked me to serve on that committee as well.

Due to the slimmest possible conservative majority, and the fact that some conservatives had voted against past versions of the Voter ID bill, it was obvious that we would not pass a bill without some bi-partisan support. By addressing the legitimate concerns of certain of my friends who had previously voted against other versions of the Voter ID bill, I believe I had the votes to pass a bill that would improve the security of our state's elections without in any way placing any unreasonable barrier in the way of any legal voter. Unfortunately, other members who opposed any version of the bill chose to engage in an unprecedented procedural tactic to kill an entire calendar of bills — including the Voter ID bill — by wasting more

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09/02/2014

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than five days of legislative time on a Local and Consent Calendar that typically takes a couple of hours. We will obviously have to change our House rules going forward to prevent this tactic, as any single member may, otherwise, shut the process down if they oppose any bill on the calendar.

Despite this highly publicized conflict, there were many success stories, some of which are indicated in this newsletter for your information.

As always, this letter was not written by a political consultant, but by me at my desk.

It is an honor to serve as your representative in our state capitol.

Sincerely,

Todd Smith